

Course Syllabus - Uncommon Reading
Why Learn? How the Classroom Can Provide More Than a Job?
IDH 2930 - 1G67 - 'Why Learn?' - Fall 2017

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 9-10am or by appointment

Meeting time: Thursdays, Period 9 (4:05-4:55pm), Little 119

Required Text: Mark Edmundson. *Why Teach? In Defense of Real Education*.
Bloomsbury.

Course Description:

Topic: What's the point of college? What does a bachelors degree get you these days? Is the university merely a place to gain skills that lead to a job? Or can it be a place to explore curiosities and passions, wherever they may lead? What's the ultimate purpose of an education, anyway? In this course we will consider these questions and more as we try to imagine what the classroom can offer those who enter? Specifically, we will explore whether there are ways that higher education can contribute to one's life that cannot be measured by the kind of employment that may (or may not) follow? Through this collection of essays, English professor Mark Edmundson, offers, on one hand, a clear criticism of the ways university education has taken shape, and, on the other hand, considers ways to support, reclaim, and reinvigorate the undergraduate educational experience. Edmundson weaves classic literary works with his own reflection and experience to suggest that there might be space cleared (or guarded?) so that the classroom can contribute in significant ways to the lives of those who fully engage. But what shall we put in this space? This class will unpack Edmundson's thought, consider whether our own experience in the university fits, and, in the end, try to make our own space for working out an answer to the question: why learn? and related questions.

Approach: This seminar style course, defined by classroom conversation, will provide students the opportunity to read and discuss the course material carefully and reflectively. We will consider Edmundson's thought alongside related articles, poetry, and film. Our reading will culminate weekly in classroom discussion to interact with the author's ideas and formulate our own. Additionally, students will participate in reflection through short writing assignments as they interact with the topics we cover.

Categorizing the course: an experiment for a thicker, richer classroom. This course will move back and forth from the various focal points in university education to wider experiences in learning that will help us test the idea that the ideas and conversation that can happen within a classroom can contribute to an enhancement of human experience. More than that, we will be attempting to live out the notion that even in a place like UF, which sometimes feels like a

factory approach to learning, the classroom can contribute to a trajectory of lifelong learning that enriches our humanity.

Course Objectives:

1. Read *Why Teach?* (and related material) carefully and reflectively
2. Understand and articulate Edmundson's ideas, placing in context of our own experience
3. Engage the text *critically and respond personally
4. Discuss the text in a thoughtful way that includes both careful reading and careful listening.

*Critically does not mean negatively only. It means that it is expected that you will be able to distance yourself enough to fairly and thoughtfully analyze the content, evaluating in ways that allow you to offer thoughtful response and not merely agree or disagree. This critical stance should be framed by a generous posture on your part. Please read "Reading Charitably" in Canvas.

Key questions to provide our framework

- What should a college education offer students? What's it "for"?
- What is the role that universities should play in society?
- For whatever we see now, is it what we want to see? Is there an alternative?
- What might the classroom experience look like if we are to make it what we want it to be?
- Are there commonly held values we can appeal to that help shape the classroom?
- What is human flourishing, what contributes to it, and how does education factor into it?

A Word About Academic and Human Discourse: Going Beyond Civility

(Note: the following is at least one way we seek to cultivate a different kind of classroom experience than what might be common.)

This is a humanities class that raises *existential questions* related to the human experience. It necessarily probes issues that are sometimes thorny, don't always have clear answers and includes ones in which people can have strong differences of opinion. One way to think of the class is to see it as a big conversation about big issues. Optimal participation comes from the ability to be fully engaged: observant, reflective, and imaginative as we enter into conversation. In order for us to have a successful class, we need to have a sustained conversation in which members are humble, respectful, thoughtfully engaged, and still free to critique (offer friendly push-back). There should be room for articulation of individual perspectives, while leaving room for disagreement and friendly critique. All of us should respectfully listen to the author's views as well as each other's, without becoming dismissive or defensive, a common default when disagreement is detected; and after listening, we need to be able to converse about what we hear. As these ideals are upheld we hope to create an environment where we all sense that,

fundamentally, we are in this together in spite of our differences. (Please see article in Canvas: "Reading Charitably".)

All in all, it will be useful to grant ourselves a freedom to think in large terms about life - at the deepest levels of personal conviction. This is not a facts and information class, although we certainly hope to be learning something; this is a class in which we will think about education through a lens: pondering and learning about what it means to be human by processing, thinking well about, and interacting over the big ideas that come to us through our reading and discussion.

Assignments and Grades:

Attendance and Participation 25% (250 points)

Weekly Blog/Discussion Posts 30% (10 x 30 points = 300)

Review Essay 20% (200 points)

Final Essay 25% (250 points)

Each week we will read one or more chapters plus a supplemental article, video, or poem. Students will be responsible to read and actively discuss the material each week, as well as write a blog post that might also be posted in discussion. *If enrollment is small enough, students may have rotating responsibility to lead part of the discussion.*

All assignments will be submitted through Canvas/e-learning as directed. Students will receive ½ credit for all late assignments up to one week from the due date. Assignments more than one week late will not be accepted. Grading for assignments will be based on 1) the accuracy of your understanding of the material; 2) the organization and clarity of your writing; 3) the persuasiveness of your arguments; and, 4) not least, your focus on responding to questions as asked.

Attendance and Participation:

Since this is a discussion-based class that meets only once a week, attendance is vital and assumed. Except for emergencies, absences must be cleared with the instructor prior to class. Students will be permitted **one** absence over the course of the semester. A second absence will lower the course grade by ½ a letter grade, and a third or fourth absence by an additional full letter grade each. Students cannot receive credit for the class if there are more than four absences.

In addition to attendance, students are expected to regularly contribute to classroom discussions. Participation will be measured by verbal contribution in class as well as interaction via online discussion in Canvas (e-learning). Regarding online Discussion, the instructor will monitor and note both the frequency of comments and the quality of engagement. A worthy goal would be to initiate a discussion, comment on a discussion, or pose questions weekly in the Discussion forum in Canvas. Further participation could include making connections between class readings and your observations in culture (bringing to our attention related articles, books,

poetry, film, artwork, thinkers, personal experiences).

In-class discussions will sometimes be led by the instructor, sometimes by class members, sometimes by the collective class. Each class member should come to class ready to contribute every week, and not merely to listen.

*Each week, students should come with 1-2 discussion questions that you would want to ask if you were leading a discussion on the assigned reading. As much as possible, questions should reference specific passages in the text. Questions should be included in the blog posts (see next).

Blog/Canvas Discussion:

Students will keep a weekly blog with brief reflections (100 words minimum, 250 words maximum) in response to the reading assignments. The post should be copied and pasted into the discussion section of e-learning. Students may consider using the following questions as prompts: (these are also helpful for class discussion)

- Which of the author's thoughts most captured your attention this week?
- What do you find confusing in them?
- What do you find most compelling or affirm in his thinking?
- How would you criticize or improve his thought?

Each weekly blog post should include 1-2 thoughtful questions that could lead to discussion in class.

Blog URLs will be submitted weekly **AT MIDNIGHT THE DAY BEFORE CLASS, with instructor response periodically. Details will be provided in class. See assignment sheet in Canvas - Assignments.

Review of Creative Work: film/art review essay - 500 words. Details given in class.

Final Reflection Paper: 1000 words. Details given in class.

Grading Scale:

93-100 (A); 90-92 (A-); 87-89 (B+); 83-86 (B); 80-82 (B-); 77-79 (C+); 73-76 (C); 70-72 (C-); 67-69 (D+); 60-66 (D); 60-62 (D-); Below 59 (E)

Film Nights:

Film and other art forms are excellent avenues for gaining insight into the kinds of issues and questions we will encounter in this class. Discussing film with others can nurture deeper understanding as well as forge connections with our fellow viewers. In this spirit, we will have two film nights outside of class time, in which we will view a film and have a short follow-up discussion. If you cannot make a film night, it will be your responsibility to view the selected film

on your own. Dates to be announced.

Classroom Decorum:

Your full attention is expected while in class. Please turn off and store out of sight all cell phones, laptops, tablets, and electronic devices prior to class. No electronic devices should be turned on in class, without consent of instructor.

Academic Integrity:

Students are expected to act in accordance with the University of Florida policy on academic integrity. Cheating, lying, misrepresentation, or plagiarism in any form is unacceptable and inexcusable behavior. For more information, visit:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

Accommodations for students with disabilities:

If you require classroom accommodation because of a disability, you must first register with the Disability Resource Center <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc>. The Disability Resource Center will provide documentation to you, which you then give to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

Course Schedule

Date	Reading/Content	Written Assignment
	Syllabus, intro. to class	
	ME: Intro. + Lib. Arts & Lite Ent (p.27) supplement:	blog post 1
	ME: Dwelling in Poss. (p. 47)	blog post 2
	ME: Who Are You and What Are You Doing Here? (p. 67) + Wendell Berry: The Loss of the Univ. (in Canvas: supplemental folder)	blog post 3
	ME: Do Sports Build Character? + Glorious Failure (p. 95)	blog post 4
	ME: The Globalists + The Corporate City (p. 111) FILM NIGHT: tba	blog post 5
	ME: The English Major (p. 118) + supplement: David Foster Wallace -	blog post 6

	<p>“This is Water audio” (text can be read here)</p>	
	<p>ME: My First Intellectual + Pink Floyd Night School (p. 139)</p>	<p>review essay due: What’s Art For?</p>
	<p>LISTEN: On Being podcast: Beyond the Ivory Tower (see assignment sheet)</p>	<p>blog post 7</p>
	<p>ME: note: <u>skip</u> New Humanities Prof. do: Against Readings + Narcissus and Common Reader (p. 179)</p>	<p>blog post 8</p>
	<p>NO CLASS ME: Uncoolness of Good Teachers (p. 185) + View on your own full length film: TBA</p>	<p>blog post 9</p>
	<p>ME: Teaching the Truths (p. 210)</p>	<p>blog post 10</p>
	<p>ME: Under the Sign of Satan (p. 222) + Mizzou Pres. Downfall</p> <p>FILM NIGHT: TBA</p>	
	<p>NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING</p>	
	<p>Volf: Human Flourishing</p>	<p>Final Essay Due <u>Dec.</u></p>